

REFUGEE

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Canada's Response to Black African Immigrants

Yohannes Gebresellasie

Black Africans are nontraditional immigrants in Canada. Canada's traditional immigrants were from Europe and the United States. Prior to 1900 there were two major migrations of persons of African descent, who left the United States for Canada. "After the American War of independence, many United Empire Loyalists came to Canada with their slaves."¹ Also, approximately 3,000 blacks who had fought for the British settled in Nova Scotia. In 1833, the government of Upper Canada passed an act that gave some rights to blacks. The act stated that "Negro slaves from the United States (in Canada) will not be extradited except for crimes of murder, larceny, or similar crimes of violence."² As a result, about 40,000 to 50,000 blacks found sanctuary in Canada. After 1900, however, Canadian policy strongly discouraged nonwhite immigration. Even as late as 1950 blacks were "inadmissible unless they fell in the preferred classes or were the spouses or minor children of Canadian residents."³ When Canada abandoned its discriminatory immigration policy in 1967, black African migrants, particularly those with higher education and professional skills, were able to enter Canada as long as they could compete along the same standards with European or American immigrants.

Until then most immigrants who managed to enter Canada were of European descent, many of them from Great Britain. The records of de facto refugees who entered Canada from 1947 to 1967 list none of African origin, although some may have been included under the category of "Others." From 1968 to 1973, 207 African refugees came from the following countries: Egypt (8), Libya (3), Malawi (6), South Africa (3), Tanzania

(18) and Uganda (169). In 1972 Canada accepted some 6,000 Ugandan Asians. According to Dirks (1977, 244), those Ugandan refugees

spoke English, possessed above average education and were considered to be self-reliant. In addition the majority of those applying to enter Canada easily qualified for admission under normal immigration regulations. These people, therefore, were the type Canada's immigration policy sought to attract. The only procedures and service programs which distinguished the Ugandan Asian movement from normal immigration patterns consisted of the dispatching of an immigration team to Kampala where no officials were normally posted, and the transporting of refugees to Canada initially was at government expense. Once in Canada, the refugees found themselves treated for the most part like any other immigrant with respect to government services.

During the 1970s immigration from Africa to Canada more than doubled compared to the 1950s and 1960s (see Table 1).

Northern African countries have been major sources of immigrants to Canada during the 1960s. Those countries encouraged emigration for people whose skills were not essential; this was considered one solution to domestic economic problems. In the 1970s more and more immigrants came to Canada from eastern African countries to escape political conflicts in the Horn of Africa. For example, Idi Amin's dictatorship in Uganda led to the expulsion of Ugandans, and conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Tigray caused thousands to leave their countries to seek safety elsewhere.

During the 1980s and 1990s, socio-economic and political conditions in Africa have increased the number of refugees from one million in 1970 to the

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current figure of approximately five million. This represents 1 percent of the total African population. The majority of African refugees are from the Horn of Africa. Refugees from this region are the second largest concentration of refugees anywhere, exceeded only by the estimated five to six million Afghan refugees who fled from the civil war in their country to camps in Pakistan and Iran.

Canada's Response to African Refugees

From the earliest days of the United Nations, Canada has played an important role in promoting peace and stability around the world and helped to create various humanitarian organizations, such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, in order to help countries resolve their problems with displaced persons. Canada gave landed immigrant status to more than 160,000 eastern European refugees in the postwar years and encouraged the international community to work together to resolve the refugee crisis. Generally, the Canadian government has followed a liberal internationalist approach with regard to migration that reflects a humanitarian perspective to the problem of refugees and displaced people within the constraints of its domestic socio-economic and political objectives.

The 1976 *Immigration Act* recognizes Canada's international obligation to refugees, the displaced and the persecuted. In that regard, Canada has welcomed significant numbers of displaced people from all over the world. When Canada introduced the refugee class in 1976, Africans refugees were mainly from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti and Uganda. An analysis of the Immigration and Refugee Board statistics for the year 1991, shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5, indicates that there were claims from virtually every country in Africa and those fleeing persecution have been generally given protection.

Canada has made financial contributions to help solve the African refugee crisis within the continent of Africa as opposed to resettling them in Canada. Canada's contributions to UNHCR (approximately \$3-4 million annually)

are provided by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); however, policy decisions are made by the Office of External Affairs in conjunction with CIDA and Canada Employment and Immigration.

The overall Canadian contribution to Africa is minimal compared to Canadian investments in South Africa. Some

humanitarian organizations, such as Christian Aid, argue that industrialized countries, including Canada, should be more responsible in seeking solutions to refugee problems. One solution is increasing financial aid to international and nongovernmental agencies and the other is accepting more refugees from Third World countries.

Table 1 African Migration to Canada (1950-79)		Table 2: African Immigration Compared to Total Annual Immigration to Canada			
Year	Volume	Year	Total	African	%
1950	213	1966	194,747	3,924	2.0
1951	313	1967	222,876	4,596	2.1
1952	698	1968	183,974	5,205	2.8
1953	902	1969	161,531	3,347	2.1
1954	755	1970	147,713	2,858	1.9
1955	548	1971	121,900	2,816	2.3
1956	1,079	1972	122,006	8,428	6.9
1957	2,970	1973	184,100	8,360	4.5
1958	1,355	1974	218,465	10,381	4.8
1959	843	1975	187,881	9,950	5.3
1960	833	1976	149,429	7,631	5.1
1961	1,088	1977	114,914	6,322	5.5
1962	2,171	1978	86,313	4,270	4.9
1963	2,431	1979	112,096	3,959	3.5
1964	3,874	1980	143,366	4,332	3.0
1965	3,196	1981	128,741	4,891	3.8
1966	3,661	1982	121,268	4,516	3.7
1967	4,608	1983	89,323	3,669	4.1
1968	5,204	1984	88,515	3,584	4.0
1969	3,297	1985	84,640	3,581	4.2
1970	2,863	1986	99,788	4,822	4.8
1971	2,841	1987	153,078	8,600	5.6
1972	8,308	1988	162,266	9,424	5.8
1973	8,307	1989	192,088	12,214	6.4
1974	10,450	1990	212,975	13,426	6.3
1975	9,867	Total	3,683,993	155,106	4.2
1976	7,752				
1977	6,372				
1978	4,261				
1979	3,958				
Total	105,018				

Source: Employment and Immigration Canada, *Immigration Statistics*, 1980.

Source: Statistics Canada, 1990.

Table 3: Initial Hearing Data for African Refugee Claimants in Canada Period: January 1 to December 31, 1991						Table 4: Full Hearing Data for African Refugees in Canada Period: January 1 to December 31, 1991					
Country of Origins	Claims Concluded	Withdrawn	Not Eligible	Credible Basis		Country of Origin	Claims Concluded	Withdrawn	Refugee Status		% Accept
				Yes	No				Yes	No	
Algeria	222	5	0	186	31	Algeria	103	12	48	44	52.2
Angola	36	0	0	36	0	Angola	33	3	15	6	71.4
Benin	1	0	0	1	0	Benin	2	0	1	1	
Botswana	1	0	0	1	0	Botswana	1	0	1	0	
Burkina-Faso	4	0	0	4	0	Burkina-Faso	1	0	1	0	
Burundi	0	0	0	0	0	Burundi	2	0	2	0	
Cameroon	8	1	0	6	1	Cameroon	10	1	3	5	37.5
Ken. African Rep.	1	0	0	1	0	Ken. African Rep.	3	0	0	2	
Chad	5	0	0	5	0	Chad	5	0	3	1	75.0
Congo	3	0	0	3	0	Congo	3	0	1	1	
Djibouti	9	0	0	8	1	Djibouti	8	0	5	2	71.4
Egypt	50	1	0	42	7	Egypt	20	1	9	11	45.0
Ethiopia	751	1	0	747	1	Ethiopia	557	13	395	71	84.8
Gabon	7	0	0	2	5	Gabon	1	0	0	3	
Gambia	2	0	0	2	0	Gambia	8	1	0		
Ghana	1,119	23	0	1,078	90	Ghana	714	64	233	285	45.0
Guinea	26	1	0	22	3	Guinea	14	2	7	7	50.0
Guinea-Bissau	0	0	0	0	0	Guinea-Bissau	0	0	1	0	
Ivory Coast	10	0	1	7	2	Ivory Coast	6	0	2	2	50.0
Kenya	124	1	1	115	7	Kenya	124	2	90	32	73.8
Lesotho	1	0	0	1	0	Lesotho	0	1	0	0	
Liberia	54	0	0	53	1	Liberia	36	3	19	14	57.6
Libya	52	2	0	49	1	Libya	34	1	22	9	71.0
Madagascar	3	0	0	3	0	Madagascar	0	1	0	0	
Malawi	4	0	0	4	0	Malawi	5	0	1	4	20.0
Mali	113	0	0	112	1	Mali	98	1	58	31	65.2
Mauritania	2	0	0	2	0	Mauritania	3	0	3	0	
Mauritius	3	0	0	3	0	Mauritius	0	0	0	0	
Morocco	22	2	0	14	6	Morocco	15	2	6	9	40.0
Mozambique	0	0	0	0	0	Mozambique	1	0	0	1	
Namibia	0	0	0	0	0	Namibia	0	1	0	0	
Niger	10	0	0	10	0	Niger	2	0	0	2	
Nigeria	570	8	0	529	33	Nigeria	283	24	72	160	31.0
Rwanda	20	0	0	20	0	Rwanda	12	1	11	0	100.0
Senegal	12	0	0	10	2	Senegal	3	2	0	3	
Seychelles	433	0	0	432	1	Seychelles	254	6	196	33	85.6
Sierra Leone	7	0	1	4	2	Sierra Leone	5	0	3	2	60.0
Somalia	3,687	4	0	3,657	26	Somalia	4,059	54	3,672	292	92.6
South Africa	43	2	0	38	3	South Africa	46	1	21	26	44.7
Sudan	222	0	0	221	1	Sudan	177	4	150	21	87.7
Tanzania	23	1	0	20	2	Tanzania	8	1	1	8	11.1
Togo	17	0	0	17	0	Togo	8	1	3	4	42.9
Tunisia	12	1	0	6	5	Tunisia	8	0	7	1	87.5
Uganda	30	0	0	28	2	Uganda	37	1	27	11	71.1
Zaire	380	1	0	375	4	Zaire	262	3	207	40	83.8
Zambia	11	0	5	6	0	Zambia	8	1	1	5	16.7
Zimbabwe	1	0	0	0	1	Zimbabwe	1	1	1	0	
Total	8,111	54	8	7,880	239	Total	6,980	209	5,298	1,153	82.1
<i>Source: Immigration and Refugee Board, news release, February 11, 1992.</i>						<i>Source: Immigration and Refugee Board, news release, February 11, 1992.</i>					

Table 5:
Refugee Claim Data for Major Refugee Source Countries from Africa
 (January 1 to December 31, 1991)

	Country of Origin	Claims Concluded	Withdrawn	Convention Refugee Status		
				Yes	No	% Accepted
1.	Somalia	4,059	54	3,672	292	92.6
2.	Ghana	714	64	233	285	45.0
3.	Ethiopia	557	13	395	71	84.8
4.	Nigeria	283	24	72	160	31.0
5.	Zaire	262	3	207	40	83.8
6.	Seychelles	254	6	196	33	85.6
7.	Sudan	177	4	150	21	87.7
8.	Kenya	124	2	90	32	73.8
9.	Algeria	103	12	48	44	52.2
10.	Mali	98	1	58	31	65.2
	Top-10 total	6,631	183	5,121	1,009	83.5
	Others	349	26	177	144	55.1
	Total	6,980	209	5,298	1,153	82.1

Source: Immigration and Refugee Board, news release, Feb. 11, 1992.

Conclusion

Canada's immigration policy with regard to blacks in general and black Africans in particular is a recent development. Growing numbers of refugees were accepted for humanitarian reasons, which increased the number of non-traditional immigrants or refugees in Canada. At present, Canada is facing one of its greatest challenges in terms of refugee claimants from Third World countries. Is Canada doing its part in sharing the refugee burden? Is its policy just or discriminatory towards certain groups?

Canadian immigration policy did not encourage resettlement of Africans. The entry of Africans to Canada has always been restrictive, even after the "White Canada Policy" was abolished. The African immigration to Canada averaged only about four percent of the total immigration to Canada.

Canada's financial assistance has been channelled either directly to host governments or to UNHCR or other international governmental and humanitarian agencies. Canada has supported a number of UNHCR's policy issues with

regard to Africa, which included encouraging voluntary repatriation, resolving conflicts, assisting countries in reintegrating refugees and collaborating with organizations such as the Organization of African Unity. As a member of the international community and a defender of human rights, Canada has a responsibility in helping to resolve the displacement of migrants or refugees and fulfilling its international obligation in humanitarian aid. It is also to Canada's advantage to see peace and stability maintained in Third World countries because they may become Canada's major trading partners in the future. ■

Notes

1. Gerald Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference Or Opportunism* (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 22.
2. Ibid., 23.
3. Rhoda Howard, "The Canadian Government's Response to the African Refugee Problem," *Journal of African Studies* 15, no. 1 (1981): 103.

U.S. Refugee Approval Rate by Region and Selected Nationality, Fiscal Year 1992*

	Total Claims	Percentage of Claims	
		Decided	Accepted
Total	144,540	88.1	89.1
By Region			
USSR	68,341	99.3	96.6
East Asia/Pacific	33,319	99.7	95.6
Africa	13,480	58.4	77.8
Latin America/Caribbean	6,403	63.4	61.4
Eastern Europe	6,245	66.7	54.9
Near East/S. Asia	16,182	65.0	53.5
By Country			
Afghanistan	5,199	96.9	89.2
Albania	2,828	69.6	35.9
Bulgaria	385	75.5	42.5
Burma	60	100.0	50.0
Cambodia	58	98.3	84.2
Cuba	4,326	85.3	89.7
Czechoslovakia	54	24.5	100.0
Ethiopia	7,248	50.1	71.6
Haiti	2,128	81.0	1.2
Iran	4,731	74.5	50.3
Iraq	6,260	62.8	60.5
Laos	6,243	100.0	97.8
Liberia	1,807	87.4	89.2
Mozambique	30	43.3	7.7
Poland	772	17.4	100.0
Romania	2,893	77.4	52.5
Somalia	3,264	53.5	90.7
South Africa	37	64.9	79.2
Sudan	447	30.2	88.9
Uganda	542	35.2	46.1
USSR	68,341	99.3	96.6
Vietnam	26,845	99.6	95.2
Zaire	534	18.7	97.0
Subtotal	142,716	88.0	90.5

*Preliminary figures.

Note: The total includes all nationalities. Nationalities for whom fewer than a total of ten cases were approved or denied are not included in the country-by-country tally.

Source: Adapted from *Refugee Reports/December 1992*, U.S. Committee for Refugees, Washington, DC.